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Environment Department Signs Important Contract to Help San Juan County Study Ozone

(Santa Fe, NM) – A contract recently signed by the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will help the agency identify causes and potential strategies to reduce elevated ground-level ozone in San Juan County.

Alpine Geophysics, LLC, and ENVIRON International Corporation will perform photochemical air quality modeling and analysis. The contracted work will be completed pursuant to the Early Action Compact for ozone in San Juan County, an intergovernmental agreement for proactively addressing this dangerous air pollutant.

The Early Action Compact was reached in 2002, after NMED recorded several consecutive years of abnormally high ozone levels in the area. The ozone level in San Juan County was approaching the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for the substance. If ozone levels began to exceed the national standard, the area would have been subject to strict regulations as well as health and economic impacts.

To address the problem before it got out of hand, NMED held public meetings in San Juan County and facilitated the creation of the Early Action Compact, an agreement that allows governments in San Juan County and NMED's Air Quality Bureau to work together on a proactive study of the formation of ozone. The goal of the study is to determine what measures, if any, would help maintain and/or lower ozone levels in San Juan County before the NAAQS is exceeded. San Juan County, the Cities of Aztec, Bloomfield, and Farmington, NMED, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency signed the Early Action Compact in December, 2002.

One advantage of the Early Action Compact is that it maintains decision-making power at the local level. During the next 12 months, Alpine Geophysics and ENVIRON will undertake a series of analyses to support informed local decision-making about ozone in San Juan County. The contractors' work will result in a thorough understanding of the cause(s) of high ozone concentrations in the area.

and what measures may be taken to improve the likelihood of ozone levels staying below the NAAQS.

A public meeting in San Juan County is planned for July 9 2003, during which introduction of the contractors will take place and a representative from Alpine Geophysics will be on hand to answer questions. For more information, please contact Mary Uhl, Manager of the Air Quality Bureau's Planning and Policy Section, at (505) 955-8086 or Jon Goldstein, NMED Communications Director at (505) 827-0314.

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